



Envision Arlington Diversity Task Group Planning / Work Session

Date: Monday, June 17, 2019
Time: 6:45 – 9:45PM
Location: Arlington Town Hall Annex, 1st Floor Conference Room

Minutes

Attendance: Michaiah Healy, Mary Harrison, Purvi Patwari, Katell Guellec, Jane Lynch, Rajeev Soneja, Laura Kiesel, Kelly Lynema, Lynette Martyn, Miriam Stein, Brooks Harrelson.

Objectives: To articulate the long range vision of the Diversity Task Group, and identify actions that will advance us toward realizing that vision.

1. Welcome / Ice Breaker:
 - a. Participants will shared their name and what cooking/baking spice that makes them feel at home.
 - b. Self-Compassion Break
2. Where we've been and what we've done
 - a. An overview of DTG's activities and achievements since its inception.
 - b. Discussion: what activities, events, actions, or meetings have been most effective?
 - i. A goal is for a HS intern to work on a timeline of racism and DTG (the latter started in 1993).
 - ii. Miriam moved here in 1974 and spoke about the culture of the town then (very White, people came to work on the farms, few Jews). There was a civil rights committee (one success was boys club became boys and girls club). In 1980s, towns needed a fair housing plan, so that happened in Arlington. Vision2020 started in 1992-93 rather than work from crisis to crisis, and the first goal was establishment of a human rights commission, and there was lots of opposition; there were incidents of anti-Semitism. Another activity was a diversity calendar listing holidays, etc. Also published a series of profiles in diversity in the Advocate. A few more POC moved here and had trouble in the schools and DTG members met with Superintendents, and African-American Society paid for a history sequence for 11th grade. That evolved into the Superintendent's Advisory Committee to influence hiring.

Barriers identified: no HR person, not enough candidates found, etc. Worked to collaborate with groups in town, and it was very helpful once when all the diversity-related groups in town met. The Arlington Reads project became a yearly initiative for last 10 years, with various events in Town Hall to expand people's horizons.

- iii. The Superintendent's Committee have achieved cultural competency training in the schools, and the establishment of the DIGs with the superintendent's support.
 - iv. Other achievements: speaker series, sanctuary town status, engaging public opinion, Black Lives Matter vigil, stereotypes photography exhibit, Nepal vigil after earthquake, Ferguson vigil, parking ban, unconscious bias talk, improv playback and true story theatre, launch of website.
 - v. What has been effective? Parking ban = immediate impact. Superintendent's group brings about enduring change, as well as the AHRC, because they affect structures in a lasting way.
3. Where DTG (and Arlington as a whole) is right now regarding diversity
- a. Participants will contribute to a SWOT analysis of the town's current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in regard to diversity
 - i. Strengths
 - 1. DIGS working collaboratively across schools to give district wide glance of parent sentiments and issues within schools
 - 2. Many groups are addressing issues of diversity (HRC, Rainbow, Senior Center/COA, library, disability commission, schools)
 - 3. Aware of issues related to systemic discrimination and lack of diversity in decision making
 - 4. Consciousness of institutionalized privilege
 - 5. Many resources are available to address diversity broadly (True Story Theater, ACA, Churches)
 - 6. Multi-cultural niches
 - 7. Small group of dedicated individuals "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead
 - 8. DIG Groups
 - 9. We have an HRC
 - 10. Many educated citizens
 - 11. Location (urban access)
 - 12. Progressive Town Meeting Members
 - 13. "Neighborhood" elementary schools
 - 14. Disability Commission
 - 15. Human Rights Commission

16. Low violent crime
17. Community events throughout town (town day, feast of the east..)
18. Non-binding sanctuary status
19. DTG- Michaiah, Networking/listening skills, Laura's tenacity, research skills, Brooks' organizing
20. Programs for families
21. Lots of volunteers
22. The selectboard and groups are really dedicated
23. A lot of people are well-meaning (intention)
24. Size (small group can make a difference)
25. For suburb is more down-to-earth (more accessible than our more affluent neighbors)
26. Hungry to learn (we show-up to vigils and meetings)
27. Increased diverse population
28. Official policies support diversity
29. Non-governmental groups support and work for diversity
30. Neighborly

ii. Weaknesses

1. History of us/them, newcomers/old-timers mentality (current also)
2. Many unaware people
3. Less commercial tax base
4. Weak AHRC
5. Legacy of difference = bad (sameness = good)
6. DTG- no real budget
7. Hesitant to accept the views of the "other" leads to acceptance if they don't make waves
8. Often declares we don't have a problem
9. Diversity related groups don't coordinate efforts
10. Expensive housing
11. No housing commission
12. Weak disability commission
13. growth/change too quickly or non nimble administration/structure
14. majority employees in town are white, leads to static perspectives
15. Many in town don't support diversity
16. Communications- diversity is not signaled on websites etc.
17. Increasing polarization about critical issues (education, housing)
18. Public is not well informed about how (many) policy decisions are made (town meeting)
19. We are busy
20. We have vigil fatigue

21. The anti-hate message is not strongly communicated from leadership
22. racist/intolerant social media posts
23. nepotism/compromised APD
24. Bad landlords
25. Envision Arlington has not worked to create diversity of town group members and chairs
26. Lack of communication between town meeting members and residents
27. We don't know our history (segregation to present)
28. We're not connected to the needs/concerns of our neighbors
29. Lack of civility in discussions about hot issues (even town meeting had to call out good/bad behavior) examples of intolerance at schools, in meetings, and on the A-list
30. Government reps have a low underprivileged representation
31. Government in general resistance
32. The watchdogs need watchdogs/falling short
33. Lack of awareness of issues
34. Resistance to change
35. Conflict of interest
36. Tendency to pat ourselves on the back
37. Progressives-self-deceiving(*editor error*)
38. Focus too much on symbolism
39. Accessibility and anonymity (e.g. public hearings)
40. Diverse policies aren't implemented
41. Large economic class divisions
42. Lack of transparency
43. Addressing the burden of difference
44. # of programs limited by the number of volunteers willing to take point on long term projects (probably not more than)
45. People of color don't always feel welcome to groups established to address diversity
46. Multi-cultural niches are segregated

iii. Opportunities

1. Significant number of people and groups to support diversity. They can be mobilized to action.
2. Town wide listening sessions to inform the need
3. Recruiting POC to leadership and public jobs
4. The school DIG groups can have a big impact on parents and kids
5. Group housing for teachers of color
6. Publicity, partnership marketing
7. Parents and Town/School leadership are hungry for a body of experts to advise and educate them on

activities and opportunities that promote civic engagement and mutual respect.

8. Warrant articles to protect low income residents (e.g. taxes)
9. Our geographic location
10. Addressing the overdue parking policies
11. education/school rankings are reviewed positively
12. Community building events “Juneteenth picnic”
13. Neighboring towns with more diversity (partnerships, resources, audiences)
14. Warrant improvements (e.g. Disability Commission)
15. Capitalize on the population changes
16. When trouble happens (school vandalism, Pedrini) there are openings for conversations and actions to take (e.g. RJ)
17. Resident can really institute new policies/groups
18. Opportunity to strengthen existing policies and programs
19. Lots of chances to raise awareness
20. Crossroads- tap into
21. Geographic location
22. DTG’s membership base is engaged
23. There are 12 leaders in this room now.
24. Opportunities to repurpose others’ programs
25. Manny community groups are connecting with the portion of the population we are engaging.
26. Current political climate and the fallout of related concerns is an opportunity to examine attitudes towards all the “isms” (racism, sexism, elitism, ageism, herosexism)
27. Formation of institutions- DTG, DIC, AHRC- allows us to make structural change
28. Momentum at the school level
29. DTG and like minded citizens have more energy and motivation than opposing forces
30. Social media lists
31. Development of a fair housing commission
32. Opportunity to have disabled participate in town meeting, HRC,
33. Police Citizen Board
34. Provide more translations on websites, forms, and marketing
35. Creation of a binding Sanctuary town
36. Census outreach

iv. Threats

1. Long term decision making setting precedents by reacting to incidents and making decisions that fit in the moment.

2. Ability for vocal minority of anti-progressives to dictate policy
3. Rising affluence/wealth gap
4. Environment issues (climate change)
5. Some really motivated town trolls/racists
6. Fear of being uncomfortable
7. Demographic shifts
8. Rising incidents of hate crimes
9. Backlash in the form of sabotaging diversity efforts
10. backlash by people who fear losing "their Arlington"
11. A single discriminatory hate incident can cause more disruption
12. The presence of few vocal disruptive voices causing dissipation of community will
13. Prioritization of funding (takes away from hiring and training)
14. Pricing diverse communities out
15. Too many opportunities to get involved with things we care about
16. Lack of communication for what is good/positive or ways to be involved or responding to crisis
17. People priced out of neighborhoods
18. Rising housing costs
19. Affordability crisis (locally and regionally)
- b. Discussion: what trends do you notice? Discussion of where Arlington falls on the continuum of anti-racist, multi-cultural institution.
4. Who is in our tent? Who should be?
 - a. Brainstorming session of who is or should be considered when DTG talks about diversity: we reviewed a document with town and community groups to make additions.
5. DTG Vision
 - a. Where should DTG (or Arlington) be in regard to diversity in 5 to 10 years?
 - b. Discussion: Where are the intersecting points? Who do we need to collaborate with?
6. Actions
 - a. How can we achieve this vision?
 - b. Participants will identify actions that DTG can take toward achieving the stated vision, and then identify which of these actions can take place in the next year.
 - c. Do we want to set specific goals for the next year? Or are we looking for overarching themes and direction? For example, we are trying to foster connection or foster civil discourse. One goal could be to get funds for an administrator to help with organizing, community outreach, etc. Could the AHRC give us some funds?
 - d. Unmet needs -- bringing together diversity-related groups so that there's a critical mass of people to put pressure on the town.

Could we do a listening session for these groups? But also we want to reach the disenfranchised, so bring those together and then bring that message back to the various commissions. There will be a need for warrants this year (civilian review board, fair housing commission, housing earmarks) and will there be a need for approvals to come through Envision Arlington; it would need to be approved first by the standing committee. Other themes are ableism, public transportation.

- e. We need to be thinking about who will step into these leadership positions in the future. So outreach this year could help.
 - f. Representation, legacy, and communication are overall themes that these issues fall under.
 - g. Hopefully there will be two interns, one for DTG and one for DIG.
 - h. Could we hold the DTG meetings in various locations around town? For example, back room in Common Ground, Menotomy Manor, Boys and Girls Club, where people are living, town tavern, senior center, etc.
7. Wrap-up
- a. Summarizing the decisions made tonight, naming responsible parties, and identifying next steps

Meeting adjourned at 9:45pm.